

A background image showing a person's hands holding an open Bible, with a blue pen resting on the pages. The image is overlaid with a dark teal color.

*Christian*  
**Leadership  
Foundations**

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*from grace to sway*

THE SEVEN PASSIONS OF BIBLICAL LEADERS

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*Christian*  
**Leadership Foundations**

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**Jesus expected that his followers,  
empowered by his Spirit, would have both  
local and worldwide influence.**

## INTRODUCTION

# Christian influence and leadership

This is a course about Christian leadership. No doubt about that. But throughout the course I have mostly used the more generic term “Christian influence” instead of “Christian leadership” to make sure that the net is cast wide. I happen to believe that the call to Christian faith is a call to leadership influence and so the passions described in this course apply to all Christians, not just those who have formal leadership roles or who see themselves as leaders.

Basically, I see leadership and influence as two sides of the same coin. “Leadership” is the function and “influence” is the method. Those who lead, influence, and those who influence, lead. You can’t lead unless you are influencing others and when you influence others you are inevitably leading.

However, I have decided to go with the term “influence” in this course because it is more foundational and inclusive in the minds of most people. But if you don’t like it, just substitute “leadership” for “influence.” I will use them interchangeably at time but will mainly talk about influence. Later in the course, as we consider more structured forms of influence, you will find the term “leadership” slipping in more frequently.

**The Bible makes it clear that every Christian is called to influence others.**

After his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He told them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus expected that his followers, empowered by his Spirit, would have both a local and a worldwide

**Those who lead, influence,  
and those who influence,  
lead.**

influence. And, of course, they did. This call of Jesus continues to motivate all Christians to mission whether locally or globally. And effective mission is definitely influencing others.

In John 15:16, Jesus spoke to his disciples about their purpose in life:

**“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”**

So, every Christian has been chosen to make a difference, to bear fruit. Much of this fruit will be produced in our lives as we reflect Jesus, but some fruit will necessarily be seen in our influence on others.

**Every Christian has been chosen to make a difference, to bear fruit.**

**Christian are called to influence others for**

**Jesus.** Many of those we influence will be fellow Christians as we live, serve and minister in families, churches and parachurch settings. Others we influence will be non-Christians in workplaces, neighbourhoods, clubs, communities, educational institutions and families. As we touch the lives of those God places around us, they will be influenced by our attitudes and values and words. In other words, every Christian is a “Christian of influence.” We all need to grow in influencing God’s way.

## The seven passions

For many years I led a theological institution that was called by God to develop Christians of influence. I constantly mulled over the questions, “What passions lie at the heart of biblical Christian influence?” and “What does God expect of Christian influencers?” My concern was not initially one of academic interest, but of the need to effectively prepare and equip Christians of influence. I felt that if I could define the basic biblical core values/passions of Christian influence, we could focus our teaching energies and resources more effectively.

Of course, this quest is not new. Many books on Christian leadership describe characteristics of Christian influence/leadership. However, I set out on my quest because I felt that these lists tended to have one of two flaws.

Some were just too pragmatic. Their ideas were helpful, but they were not serious enough about strong biblical foundations. They tended to proof-text their ideas rather than consider Scripture in its context. To me, they championed useful, practical principles with only a veneer of biblical respectability. There was no real way of telling whether the values they espoused arose from a thoughtful, biblical theology or the practicalities of the organisational leadership world.

Other approaches were too detailed. They explored Scripture carefully in its context but came up with so many ideas or principles that they couldn’t really be used as a straightforward, developmental tool for equipping Christians of influence.

**These passions sit at the centre of a leaders life and they are devoted to them.**

While I appreciated and learned from numerous sources on Christian leadership, I continued to pursue my quest for a simple but comprehensive, biblically-based summary of the foundational passions of influence that could be used to equip Christians to be effective kingdom influencers.

This course is the result of my quest. I have found seven biblical passions that underlie effective Christian influence. I have chosen to call these characteristics “passions,” but they could also be called “values” or “principles” or “standards,” and occasionally I will use these terms. But “passion” speaks to me of not just understanding or believing or even valuing these seven, but of having them sit at the centre of my life and devoting myself to them.

**I believe that developing these passions will produce the kind of Christian influence that God intends**, whether this influence lies in a family or a workplace or a church or a community or with friends.

**True Christian influence requires a passion for:**

- 1. GRACE**
- 2. LOVE**
- 3. HEART**
- 4. CROP**
- 5. FAITH**
- 6. TEAM**
- 7. SWAY**

If I was supervising this course as a research project, I would ask the student, “Why choose these seven passions and not others?” To be honest I’m not exactly sure of the answer. They certainly are biblical values and they are helpful passions for Christian leaders. I know that much. I also know that I have spent years honing these passions, integrating ideas, adding new concepts, and disregarding others.

I can’t promise that these are the only leadership passions that the Bible espouses. You will probably think of other helpful passions as you study Scripture yourself. But I do believe that these passions are both theologically sound and absolutely vital to Christian leadership. I pray that as you wrestle with them, they will help you grow in your desire and capacity to influence God’s way.

## **Operating system and applications (OS and Apps)**

Computers have operating systems that manage how the computer functions. The operating system tells the computer hardware and software how to work and interact. It is foundational to the functioning of the computer. A computer has no idea how to do anything without an operating system. A computer also has programs or applications. The apps enable the computer to

perform particular tasks efficiently. They are not foundational in that a computer can run without them, but they contribute hugely to the effective use of the computer.

**Like computer operating systems, these three passions form the foundation on which Christian influence grows.**

I have divided the seven biblical passions into two groups. **The first three passions** I have called the Operating System. Like computer operating systems, these three passions form the foundation on which Christian influence grows. Every Christian needs to focus on these passions and pursue them strongly. They will set you up for godly influence. They provide the Operating System (OS) for Christian influence. You can't influence in God's way without them.

**The second group of four biblical passions** I have called the Apps. They are the passions that Christians of influence focus on as they grow their sphere of influence and broaden their leadership. Christians who mainly influence others one-on-one, may not need to be proficient in all the Apps. But each App will provide a further biblical way to increase influence.

I have carefully chosen the order in which I am presenting the seven biblical passions. Not only do I deal with the three passions in the OS first because they are foundational, but I have organised the three in a progression so that they develop in what I see as a biblical order of priority. However, growth in each passion of the OS is vital for Christians of influence. The Apps also progress, but they develop from more basic to more complex leadership skills. So, a younger Christian influencer will probably need to focus more on the early Apps.

I have included a short self-assessment questionnaire with each of the passions so that you can gauge your development. You will probably find that God has created and gifted you in ways that make some passions more natural (and therefore easier) for you than others. For example, an influencer with inherent (God-given) spiritual awareness will probably find it easier to operate in FAITH (5) than CROP (4).

Certainly, you need to be aware of your strengths as a leader and celebrate these. Much of your influence will come through these strengths, so employ them well. But as your influence grows, a lack of competency in any of the passions will seriously undermine your effectiveness. For example, if you have a wide sphere of influence but are not strong in HEART (3), then your lack of godly character and/or wisdom will undermine your spiritual authority and impact. Or if you have not developed FAITH (5), you will probably not be able to capture and pursue God's vision for your ministry.

There will be much to process and learn in this course. I hope that you will find it provocative, interesting and insightful. But my intention in writing is not to help you understand influence better but to help you become a more effective Christian of influence with godly passions.

**So, here is my advice as to what to do with the biblical passions outlined in this course:**

**Focus on your OS first.** The OS may seem basic and therefore less important. It would be easy

to skip over to some of the more challenging Apps. But if you are weak in any of these OS passions, your Christian leadership influence will be impeded significantly. If your OS is strong, God can use you powerfully even if you don't have great leadership skills (Apps).

**Celebrate your strengths and choose one passion to work on.**

**Celebrate your strengths.** It's easy to grow a deficit mentality in which we constantly focus on our weaknesses. This approach eventually saps our energy and enthusiasm. Praise God constantly for how he has made you and what he has done to grow you. Appreciate the passions that God has already forged in you. When you come across a biblical value or principle that you are living, take time to give thanks and celebrate.

**Choose one passion to work on.** You have a whole lifetime in which to grow your influence. If you try to do too much, you will achieve little. Prayerfully choose a passion that needs development, enlist someone to hold you accountable (a mentor if possible), and work out a plan for what you need to do.

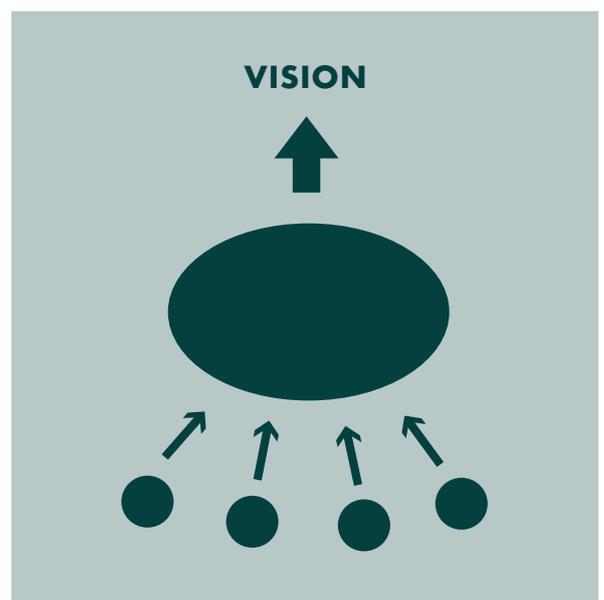
**Keep coming back to GRACE** (the first passion). Ultimately, our influence is God's work not ours. He enables and empowers us to influence through his grace. God chooses to use you, not because of your abilities or your growth, but because of his grace. If you don't centre on GRACE, the biblical passions in this course will just become more rules to follow.

## The influence of Jesus

A good place to start in our biblical quest for the passions of Christian influence is with both the words and actions of Jesus. He was and is the godly influencer extraordinaire. What passions drove his life?

When Jesus was talking about the way that influence was practised in the Roman society in which he lived, he made the following comment to his disciples, "You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (Matt. 20:25). In other words, in the Roman system leaders had authority and they knew how to use it. Their followers were expected to submit to their commands. The leaders gave the orders and the followers obeyed.

Here is a diagram in which I've tried to represent this view of influence. The large circle represents the influencer/leader and the smaller circles represent the followers (those being influenced). The sizes of the circles represent their relative significance. The leader is leading followers towards the vision for the



group. The arrows indicate a one-way relationship. The vision may be decided by the leader or externally-imposed by other higher authorities, but the leader is responsible to ensure followers work to achieve the vision.

I'm not implying that the leader in this paradigm of influence is necessarily abusive or even authoritarian. I'm sure that some of the Roman leaders were inspirational and encouraging, and were readily followed by those they led. But the relationship remained clear. The followers' role was to follow and obey the leader, and the leader's role was to influence with authority and vision and to direct followers towards the vision.

Jesus used this example of influence because he wanted to contrast it with his own paradigm of influence. I'll come to that in a minute, but first let me take a step backwards to look more broadly at Jesus' passions in his ministry.

When Jesus was asked by one of the teachers of the law, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?", he responded with this statement:

**"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."**

Mark 12:29-31

**Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the greatest commandment.**

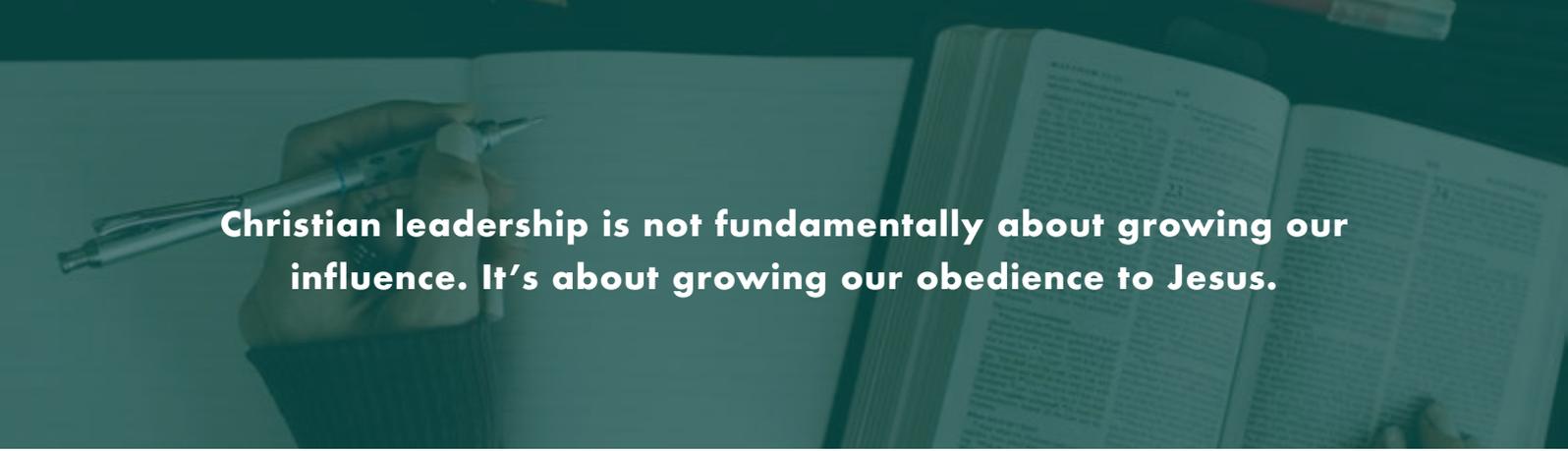
This statement is sometimes called the Jesus Creed. It summarises the heart of Jesus' ministry and his call for all his followers. We are to love God with everything we have and to love others like ourselves. That's the heart of the Old Testament. That's the call of Jesus in a nutshell.

But how did Jesus build this creed of loving God and loving others into his influence. What did Jesus do differently from the Romans who exercised strong authority and influence?

In his ministry, Jesus challenged at least two assumptions of the Roman cultural model of influence.

## Jesus' love for God

The first Roman assumption was that the authority of leaders resided in their position. They "exercised authority" because they were in charge. Because of the leader's role, their followers needed to obey them, as the leader also obeyed those in authority over them. It was not only the Roman system that operated on this principle, but also the Jewish religious system. The religious leaders claimed authority because of their position. They constantly challenged the authority of



**Christian leadership is not fundamentally about growing our influence. It's about growing our obedience to Jesus.**

Jesus because it had no basis in position. He was not high enough up the ladder to be exerting the influence that he did.

Many times, Jesus explained the source of his authority to the religious leaders. Here is an example:

**My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working... I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.**

John 5:17, 19-20

Jesus explained that his authority had nothing to do with his position or role in societal structures. Rather his authority came straight from his Father whom he completely followed. His agenda was God's agenda. His influence came from his Father. He was doing and saying what his Father told him.

Jesus was called by God to pursue his will and this is what he did. Jesus' authority and therefore influence came from obeying the call of God and following his direction.

What has obedience got to do with loving God with everything you have? Well love and obedience belong together. Jesus said,

**"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching"** (John 14:23).

Jesus linked his obedience with his love for his Father when he said:

**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.** (John 15:9-10)

**Influence doesn't come from a position but from a person - Jesus.**

As Jesus loved and therefore followed his Father, so Christians of influence love and follow Jesus (and therefore their Father). The more they follow Jesus, the stronger their authority and the greater their influence. Ultimately, influence doesn't come from a position but from a person (Jesus). The more we align ourselves with Jesus, the more our influence will grow.

So here we have the first of the two radical Jesus principles that govern all Christian influence. Spiritual authority is not about role or power or position, it's about love for Jesus and the ensuing obedience. It may sound trite, but Christians of influence are constantly asking, "What would Jesus do?" As Scot McKnight says:

*"The best leader is the best follower of Jesus. Our aim as Christian leaders is to indwell the gospel-shaped life of our Lord, and that means that the leader is first and foremost a follower of Jesus."* (Interview in Brian Harris. 2013. *The Tortoise Usually Wins*. Paternoster. 52-53.)

This does not mean that Christians of influence always ignore and work outside the systems and structures of communities as Jesus did. Positions and roles in systems can sometimes limit our Christian influence, but often they provide an opportunity to multiply influence. **But any position we have is not the source of our Christian influence, no matter how commanding it may seem to be. You could have great authority in an organisation and not be a Christian influence. Our influence flows from loving and following Jesus. That's it.**

As I discuss each of the seven biblical passions, I am first going to ask of each one, **"What does God say about this passion?" What does the Bible reveal? How is Jesus calling us to obey?"** Christian leadership is not fundamentally about growing our influence. It's about growing our obedience to Jesus. We're going to check that each of these passions has solid roots in Scripture. That they really are required by God. We want to be sure that each passion comes from God's heart and is not just a helpful skill of leadership. It's important that we see that each passion is essential in loving God and following Jesus.

## Jesus' love for others

Jesus had a second major disagreement with the Roman approach to leadership. Not only did their authority come from the wrong source but their attitude towards followers was seriously flawed. After describing the Roman system of leadership with its absolute exercise of power over followers, Jesus went on to say that this was not how his influence or the influence of his disciples operated.

He was emphatic:

**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.** (Matt 20:26-28)

Christian influence is a form of service to those who follow. I will say more about this in the second passion, LOVE, but at this point, I just want to point out the strong link Jesus forged between loving others and serving them. The great lovers are the great servants. Loving your neighbours will inevitable involve serving them.

Jesus showed his love for others by serving them. He laid down his life for those he came to influence. He did not seek to assert control but loved and cared and served, leading ultimately to his sacrifice on the cross for all of us. No wonder many ordinary people loved him. They had never seen this sort of influence before.

This is the second overarching biblical principle of Christian influence. The leader actually serves those who are following. Influence is not for the benefit of the leader or for the benefit of the cause, but for the benefit of those who are being influenced. So the second question we will ask of each of the seven passions is, "How are followers served by this passion?"

## The way Jesus influenced

So, these two aspects of influence are essential for those who would influence like Jesus. Their influence always involves following Jesus and serving others.

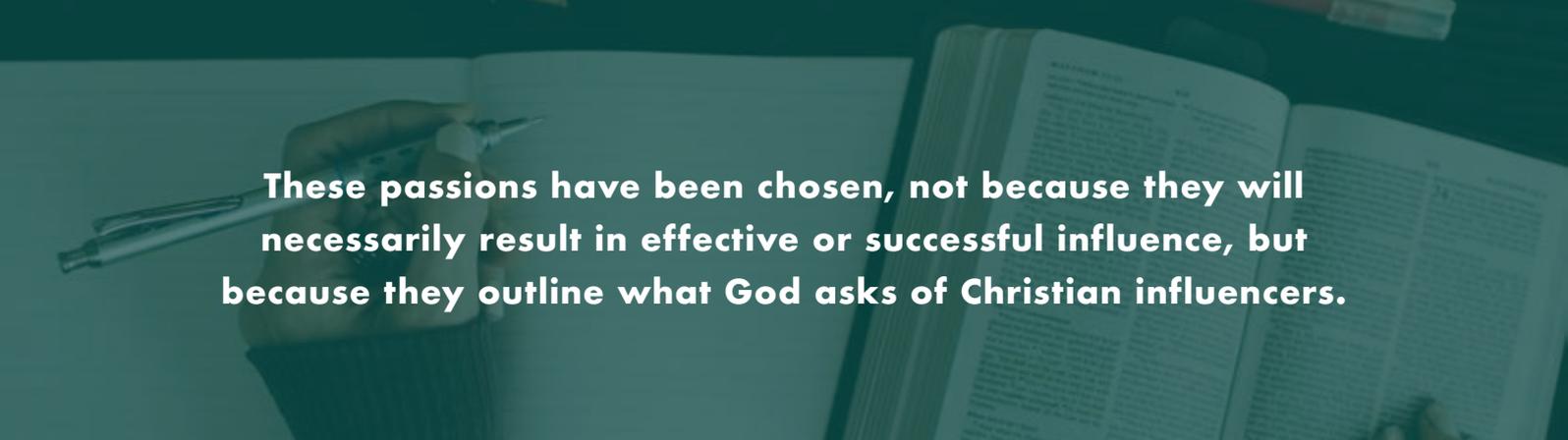
First, Christians are mindful that they are not influencing because of their position or abilities or charisma. It is because God has called them to influence. Also, they are not pursuing their own vision but God's agenda. They are conscious that they are moving those they influence towards something of eternal significance.

Second, as a Christian of influence, the relationship between you and those you influence is mutual. You serve each other, with the leader as the chief servant. Together you seek and pursue God's agenda.

Christian influence is primarily about following God and serving others. It's not really about programs or position or power or achievements or charisma or plans. The two issues we will explore with each of the seven passions are:

What does God say? (Following Jesus) How are followers served? (Serving others)

We have found that Jesus' influence was about loving and obeying God and loving and serving those who followed him. These are now the lenses through which we will examine each biblical passion of Christian influencers.



**These passions have been chosen, not because they will necessarily result in effective or successful influence, but because they outline what God asks of Christian influencers.**

## Looking forward

You don't need to worry too much about the meaning of each of the seven passions at this stage. They will be discussed in detail in the following sections. But if you are the type of person that needs to know what is happening ahead of time, to the right is a brief description of each passion.

These passions have been chosen, not because they will necessarily result in effective or successful influence, but because they outline what God asks of Christian influencers. Each comes from Scripture and is linked to one or more theological truths. There may be some situations in which practising this kind of Christian influence is not productive (at least short-term). It doesn't matter. You must do what God says. These passions are not optional. Remember that God's calling to influence is not primarily a calling to success but to servanthood. It's principally about laying down our lives, not growing our impact. However, God's ways are good, and I believe that those who live with these passions will have significant influence.

While the Bible mainly deals with godly influence in the context of the Israelite or church community, I believe that the passions outlined in this model also apply to Christian influence in secular settings. God's calling to be a Christian influencer pertains to all Christians, whatever their context. There may be some necessary contextual adapting of the passions, but they will still be foundational and relevant in a non-church context.

### **1. GRACE**

We are called by God's grace to be his children and join his kingdom work as influencers.

### **2. LOVE**

God's love for us shows in the way we love and serve those we influence.

### **3. HEART**

Driven by a heart for God and his word, we grow in our character and wisdom which produces spiritual authority.

### **4. CROP**

We rely on God and use the resources God has given us effectively and efficiently to bear kingdom fruit.

### **5. FAITH**

We hold on to God for his future promises and believe that He will work through our influence.

### **6. TEAM**

We know that God works through his body and so we build teams that serve effectively together.

### **7. SWAY**

Led by God, we strategically develop our own kingdom influence and the influence of those we lead.